New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1949

Volume X, Number 3 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of January 31, 1949

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1949 PRODUCTIONS

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**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of January 31, 1949*

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NEW YORK POST HOME NEWS — NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS — NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK MIRROR — NEW YORK STAR — NEW YORK SUN

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"Forward the Heart"

The New York Times

JANUARY 29, 1949

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

With only four characters to speak for him, Bernard Reines has tried a very difficult theme in "Forward the Heart," which was well acted at the Forty-eighth Street Theatre last evening. He has tried to state and analyze the problems of a blind white veteran of the last war who falls in love with a Negro girl and wants her to marry him.

All of the play is well written from the literary point of view—a little spare perhaps, but honest. Despite the reticence of the writing, a good deal of the play is emotionally overwhelming. For the portrait of the blind soldier trying to return to the life he knew and loved when his eyes could see is deeply poignant. And there is something genuinely moving about the blind alley these two young people get pushed into by a society organized to keep them apart. Admirably acted, particularly by William Prince and Mildred Joanne Smith in the leading parts, "Forward the Heart" brings us several scenes of heart-breaking drama and the responsible statement of a tragic situation.

* * *

For Mr. Reines, writing like an old-fashioned New England liberal, has stated the situation candidly. Coming back to a comfortable Boston home without his sight, David Gibbs is morbid and panicky. His mother's sympathy irritates him, and his uncle's compassion is no great help. But his mother's maid Julie treats him with a kindly understanding that restores his life to him. She knows his problem because she lives with a grandfather who is blind. He does not know that she is a Negro. When she tells him, he is horrified and she is wounded by his reaction. But on second thought, it is obvious that the color of her skin is trivial by comparison with the fact that they love each other on a basis of real understanding. Their problem is with the rest of the world.

* * *

If "Forward the Heart" leaves a playgoer reluctantly unconvinced, it is because in a way Mr. Reines has started something he cannot finish as a playwright. Giving himself only four characters, he has handicapped himself at the start. Since the mother and the uncle are minor characters, most of the play is a duologue between David and Julie. And after Mr. Reines at the end of the first act has established the fact that they genuinely love each other, he is confronted with a rigid situation that he cannot vary much. Either they separate or they marry.

As a matter of fact, it is not clear in the end which course they have decided to follow. In a small, narrowly confined drama, Mr. Reines does not give himself room enough to build anything very significant or illuminating on his painfully disturbing situation. By comparison with the first, the last act is trivial, enigmatic and shrill.

* * *

Under Peter Frye's direction, the performance is at once tense and fluid. Perry Watkins has designed an agreeable suburban home with a living room, hallway and one bedroom simultaneously on view. As the blind veteran, Mr. Prince gives a notable performance—dry of pathos, but all awareness, the nerves and senses alert and alive. The performance is throughly penetrating: Mr. Prince has got clear inside the character. In the opposite part of Julie, Miss Smith gives an equally sensitive performance that is filled with grace, beauty and insight. By instinctive good taste she keeps the play on a high plane of human inquiry.

The other two parts are hardly developed. They echo the theme feebly without adding anything much to it. But Natalie Schafer gives an excellent performance as the apprehensive mother, and Harry Bannister has enough warmth and style to make something positive out of the character of the uncle. As an author, Mr. Reines has stated an agonizing situation with candor and simplicity—neither evading nor exploiting it. But in the last act "Forward the Heart" needs a richness that is lacking in the invention and writing. Mr. Reines and the society of his time are alike in one respect: they cannot solve the situation or rationalize the anguish away.

'FORWARD THE HEART'

Play by Bernard Reines; staged by Peter Frye; setting by Perry Watkins; presented by Theatre Enterprises, Inc., and Leon J. Bronesky at the Forty-eighth Street Theatre, January 28, 1949. The cast:

Mrs. Marian Gibbs. . Natalie Schafer
David Gibbs. . . . . William Prince
Dr. George Whiting. . Harry Bannister
Julie Evans. . Mildred Joanne Smith

Synopsis: The Gibbs house in a fashionable suburb of Boston. Act I, Scene 1—A Monday morning toward the end of May. Scene 2—The same day. Early afternoon. Act II, Scene 1—Two days later. Early afternoon. Scene 2—Three weeks later. Act III, One week later

New York Post
HOME NEWS

JANUARY 30, 1949

An Earnest and Sincere Play Which Lacks Dramatic Skill

By Richard Watts Jr.

Although "Forward the Heart," which opened Friday night at the Forty-Eighth Street Theatre, is a fumbling and ineffectual drama, it does, in a wry sort of fashion, suggest the value of a play which contemplates a serious contemporary social problem with earnestness and intensity. Unfortunately the proof it offers is not likely to be of much comfort to Bernard Reines, its author. The trouble is that what the new work demonstrates is that even inept dramatic writing, which ordinarily would make an audience writhe with discomfort, takes on dignity and wins a show of respect when it tries honorably to say something worth saying.

It certainly is not to the discredit of Mr. Reines that he has not resolved his subject matter, since he happens to be treating of something that our society has also come far from resolving. His failure is considerably more than that. First and foremost, it comes from the inescapable fact that he writes a flat, undramatic and undistinguished prose that is incapable of providing high emotion or genuine power. In addition, he has done little more than state his problem and then offer nothing about it that is theatrically effective. The combination of weaknesses results in a completely unrealized play.

"Forward the Heart" deals with a blind young ex-soldier, who returns to his home after five years, bitter, unhappy and hopelessly unsure of himself. His well-meaning but overzealous mother irritates and upsets him, and, while his uncle is more understanding, he is of small help to the boy in his bitterness of soul. Only the new maid in the house does understand him and give him comfort and peace, and it is not until he has fallen in love with the tender and compassionate girl that he discovers she is a Negro. That, it turns out, is just about where the play begins and ends.

Human Confusion

The author clearly makes an effort to deal with the problem that arises. Futhermore, he has the objectivity to realize that, in this particular case, he is dealing, not with human villainy, but with human stupidity. The boy's mother is neither vicious nor vindictive. The uncle is honestly a man of good will. They are merely faced by a situation with which they are not prepared to cope and which leaves them upset and bewildered. To this extent the playwright knows his business admirably. Having reached that point, however, he finds little that is dramatic or arresting to add to it, and the play merely drifts off.

In the end, the girl reaches the conclusion that her situation is impossible and there is no chance for her happiness in so cruelly befuddled a world. The boy rushes off, presumably to follow her, but at this point there is such a lack of clarity that it is almost impossible to discover what conclusion the dramatist had intended to reach. What happens is that the emotion inherent in the tragic situation is never strengthened by effective dramatic plotting nor writing, and the final effect is without force or power.

Mildred Smith

By far the most important virtue of "Follow the Heart" is the playing of the girl's role. Mildred Joanne Smith, an actress of unusual sensitivity and feeling, has the part and she brings to it not only her gift for direct, honest and moving characterization but also her distinctive quality as a romantic actress of true lyric beauty. I have now seen young Miss Smith play tragic, humorous and musical comedy roles and she has never failed to give them loveliness and authentic style. Her portrayal of the understanding Negro girl has all the poignancy the author lacks in his writing.

If the other players are less impressive, they are nonetheless commendable. William Prince is entirely believable as the boy, Harry Bannister is always credible as the disturbed uncle, and Natalie Schafer, in a role that is far from her usual portrayal of a fashionable nitwit, succeeds in making the mother a mistakenly interfering busybody without destroying her status as a human being who, in the best and worst sense of the term, means well. It is a shame that the obvious sincerity of the author does not conceal his lack of force as a playwright.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

JANUARY 29, 1949

By HOWARD BARNES

Two Worlds of Darkness

A CONTROVERSIAL theme is handled with taste and considerable feeling in "Forward the Heart," which has opened at the Forty-eighth Street Theater. The Bernard Reines play considers miscegnation as a blinded war veteran falls in love with his mother's Negro maid. The author has explored his subject honestly enough, but he has failed to give it genuine dramatic substance. Even with William Prince, Mildred Joanne Smith, Natalie Schafer and Harry Bannister lending no little eloquence to the essay, it has a hard time weathering five scenes of theatrical projection. However brave in its promise, the play is scanty in fulfillment.

• • •

The germinal idea of "Forward the Heart" is responsible for both its strength and its weakness. The coupling of two worlds of darkness, one caused by blindness and the other by skin pigmentation, is immensely effective at times. The initial revulsion of the veteran when he learns that he has been making love to a Negro girl creates a passage of power and meaning. His desperate resolve to marry her, to the horror of his liberal mother and uncle, adds a wanted impetus to the proceedings. But the climax, in which he supposedly turns his back on conventions, makes the thesis special and contrived.

• • •

There is never any lack of delicacy and decorum in the production. Thanks to the rich and sincere performance of Miss Smith in the role of the maid, the drama's problem never becomes merely that of whether a white man should or should not enter into a marriage contract with a Negro. Her opposition to the scheme is far more vehement and sensible than that of the boy's mother, who is willing to condone a liason, but refuses to jeopardize the foundation for freedom of which she is the head. Miss Schafer plays the mother with skill and subtle shadings of the character, but neither she nor Miss Smith make the play more than intermittently compelling.

• • •

Prince is excellent as the sightless veteran who gives up all hope of fruitful living, until he finds a bond with another person ostracized from his pleasant Boston world. Bannister has a more difficult time with the part of the uncle, who is both a doctor of divinity and medicine, but he makes much of some fine speeches in the inconclusive ending. Peter Frye has staged the work with what pace he could muster from a repetitive script, and Perry Watkins has designed a handsome setting for the offering. The title, incidentally, was prompted by a quotation from Longfellow: "when the heart goes before, like a lamp, and illumines the pathway, many things are made clear that else lie hidden in darkness."

The Sun

JANUARY 29, 1949

By WARD MOREHOUSE

Very Serious, Very Weak.

The Forty-eighth Street Theater, tenanted for all those years by Elwood P. Dowd and his jocose rabbit, became the home last night of "Forward the Heart," a serious and social-minded drama of the love of an ex-G. I. and a Negro girl. The new piece is put on by Theater Enterprises, Inc., and Leon J. Bronesky.

"Forward the Heart" is the work of Bernard Reines. It is a cumbrous and platitudinous drama in which this new dramatist reveals sincerity of purpose and little or no skill in making a play of his material. His scenes are plodding and undramatic and his drama is left unresolved at its conclusion.

This new play, one of the shortest full-length plays that the local theater has had in years, ends abruptly. So abruptly that it leaves the impression that another and possibly more tragic finish must have been discarded during the last-minute throes of revision and redirection.

The locale of "Forward the Heart" is the Gibbs home in a fashionable suburb of Boston in the spring of "not long ago at all," as the program tells us. Young David Gibbs, blinded in wartime combat duty, is back after an absence of five years. He is in something of an agonized state about his unfitness for life until he finds companionship from a sensitive and intelligent Negro girl who is taking a university extension course in anthropology, and who is employed by his mother as a maid.

When the girl reveals that she is colored, David gets into a rage. He later apologizes. Within three weeks, he and Julie Evans have admitted their love for each other, and they're talking of marriage. But when the situation is revealed to the boy's mother and to the doctor who is a family friend of long standing, Julie flees. She returns, however, to tell the sightless David that she and her blind grandfather are in agreement on the impossibility of a union, and that she is leaving the city. David begins packing his bag for an undisclosed destination. Playwright Reines lets his final curtain fall without offering a solution.

Mildred Joanne Smith, always an affecting actress, brings warmth and gentleness and tenderness to her playing of Julie. There are good performances from the other three players—William Prince, once of the caperings of "John Loves Mary," as the confused and self-tortured G. I.; Harry Bannister, as the tolerant doctor-friend, and Natalie Schafer as the distressed mother. Miss Schafer, breaking away from a routine of brittle and sophisticated roles, is entirely believable in her anguish.

"Forward the Heart" is very slight, very inexpert and very weak.

New York World-Telegram

JANUARY 29, 1949

'Forward the Heart' Opens at 48th St.

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

As long as "Forward the Heart" tells a straightforward story of two ill-starred lovers it is tender and convincing. The instant it confronts their racial difference through the eyes of others, it becomes bombastic and trite, and the characters begin to talk as if they had memorized sincere but superficial tracts.

This is the story of a blinded veteran of 25. He returns to a widowed mother, whose time is divided between working for a liberal school called New Freedom Academy, and officiously reminding him by her every move of his sightlessness.

She employs on part time an intelligent young Negro maid who is studying to become a singer. This Julie has the sense and tact to build the blind David's confidence in himself. She teaches him to typewrite and garden, and with unconscious irony treats him as her physical equal.

It is not until David has relied on Julie to the point of falling in love with her, that he discovers she is not white.

Shocked by his original horror at this situation, he investigates his own prejudice, and finding no logical basis for it, determines to marry the girl.

His mother and uncle are aghast at his intention, and Julie herself, despite her devotion to the boy, brings objective foresight to their situation, and leaves him. In the end, the boy must make his own decision and act on it.

As a problem play, "Forward the Heart" lacks power, because its indignation is not fresh and can never disguise the fact that the big story here is not the interlude the play relates, but the long future of these two people.

In the role of Julie, Mildred Joanne Smith is admirably successful at treating the two divergent moods of the play. She is utterly simple, warm and kind toward the boy. Yet when the play's line demands that she react dramatically to the problem, she plays with convincing strength.

As David, William Prince has an assignment made doubly difficult by the physical confinement of the character. His portrayal of David's blindness is consistent and real without becoming embarrassingly conspicuous.

The visual impairment emerges finally as less of a physical block and more of a mental illumination, which is the essence of the play's theme.

Natalie Schafer is capably confused in the sketchily written role of the boy's mother, and Harry Bannister suggests more warm understanding than his lines provide as the uncle.

"Forward the Heart" is a short underdeveloped play, of good intentions toward the disparagement of prejudice, but by the special circumstances of its single situation it becomes precious without having anything particularly new to say.

Journal American

JANUARY 31, 1949

Weekend Offering

By ROBERT GARLAND

Sincerity, as such, is not sufficient. Even Adolph Hitler was sincere. It was because of his sincerity that he had to be destroyed. So when I come to writing about Bernard Reins' "Forward the Heart," which, at long last, opened Friday at the 48th Street, its sincerity is neither an asset to praise highly nor a liability to damn lowly.

As a play to be played right out in public, I mean. And it is as such that I write about it. An expert believer in the very letter of Christian democracy, Mr. Reins, the author, is no expert worker at professional dramatics. So only occasionally does his sincerity seep through the contriving of his craftsmanship.

The story "Forward the Heart" tells is of too pat a pattern for a play which is not sheer propaganda. Boy meets Girl. Boy wins Girl. Boy loses Girl. But, at the final curtain, Boy is running after Girl. Hotfootedly! The only newness lies in the fact that this Boy is white and blind; that this Girl is colored and clearsighted.

They are beautifully brought to life by William Prince as the homecoming veteran who is the apple of his mother's eye and by Mildred Joanne Smith as the housekeeping maiden who is the servant of his mother's mansion. Harry Bannister and Natalie Schafer rise superior to their material as the Boy's relatives and the Girl's employers.

The ending, which is not an honest ending, is the playwright's sole insincerity. So what can be expected when an author deserts his own play? In "Forward the Heart," Bernard Reins does just that thing. Against, I hope, his original sincere intention.

Daily Mirror

JANUARY 29, 1949

'Forward the Heart' Is Sincere But Thin

By ROBERT COLEMAN

"Forward the Heart," which Theatre Enterprises, Inc. and Leon J. Bronesky brought to the 48th Street Theatre last evening, is an earnest protest against racial discrimination. Bernard Reines penned it with simplicity, sincerity and sometimes a measure of awkwardness.

The play is based on a quotation from Longfellow: "When the heart goes before, like a lamp, and illumines the pathway, many things are made clear that else lie hidden in darkness."

Reines presents the case of a blind war veteran who returns to his home in a fashionable Boston suburb, after five years in a hospital. He decides life is not worth living until he meets and falls in love with his mother's Negro maid, a talented and studious girl.

After learning the girl is colored, the boy is shocked, but then realizes he shouldn't be. He insists the girl marry him, but she refuses because of the opposition of his mother, head of, ironically enough, the Free School, founded as a liberal institution.

As the curtain falls, the young veteran, spurning prejudice and convention, goes forth to find the girl and attempt to persuade her to marry him and let narrow-minded people of the world take it as they see fit.

William Prince and Mildred Joanne Smith are excellent as the veteran and the maid. Their acting matches the sincerity and conviction of their vehicle. Natalie Schafer and Harry Bannister are good as the veteran's mother and uncle.

The direction, credited to Peter Frye, is not overly helpful to the cast. However, there is an attractive setting by Perry Watkins.

If good intentions made a good script, "Forward the Heart" would rank high among our current attractions. Unfortunately, they do not. The new arrival impresses us as a rather thin, though honest, theatrical tract. It is so intent on putting across a message that it often fails to be sufficiently dramatic.

Honesty and high purpose alone are not enough for a successful play. We doubt that "Forward the Heart" will find a wide and profitable audience. It is one thing to admire a worthy cause, but another to pay for the privilege of supporting it.

DAILY NEWS

JANUARY 29, 1949

'Forward the Heart' Is a Gentle Drama Advising Race Tolerance

By JOHN CHAPMAN

If a war veteran is blind it should make no difference what color anything is, including the girl whom he loves. In Bernard Reines' small drama, "Forward the Heart," which was presented last evening at the 48th St. Theatre, a blind, white vet finds that the girl for him is a Negro. Since he cannot see, there is no color line and he should be happy—but she can see, and others can see, and there is no happiness for the pair because the world itself is blind.

Such is the burden of "Forward the Heart." Mr. Reines has written a simple and honest play which is acted with simple honesty by Mildred Joanne Smith and William Prince, with assists from Natalie Schafer and Harry Bannister. Once in a while the drama has some nice, tender moments, but I do not think it has enough sweep, size and style to make it a public favorite.

Mr. Prince returns to his home and his mother, feeling lost. In Miss Smith, his mother's maid, he finds beauty and understanding and hope. He wants to marry her, color line or no color line, and she loves him; but she believes that the world is not yet ready for their union.

No Solution in Play.

"Forward the Heart" offers no solution to the problem of racial differences, but it does make a gentle plea for a solution. Its hope is that, half a century or a century from now, there will be no color line.

Mr. Reines' theme is basically heroic—a tragedy on the scale of grand opera, but his play is slight, and he seems to have been hard put to fill in even the two short acts he has managed. Mr. Prince and Miss Smith play their roles effectively, so far as developing an understandable affection is concerned, and Mr. Prince manages the business of acting like a blind man with a convincing lack of exaggeration. But a drama with so large a theme should, to be important, have much greater impact than "Forward the Heart" attains.

"All for Love"

New York World-Telegram

JANUARY 24, 1949

'All for Love' Fails To Match Settings

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

There is a hulk of a very handsome show in "All for Love," with number after number surrounded by rich bright settings and a great many happy costumes. Unfortunately the content is just not there.

A few comic moments lift the performance, and a well thought out and neatly performed ballet opens the second act. But for the most part the show resembles a first go round of an intimate revue. A well-meaning if seldom brilliont company is overwhelmed by production.

It may be that the Hartmans spoiled their public last year by lifting a light revue on their shoulders and keeping it bouncing through the evening. Here they are not nearly enough in evidence, and if they insist on breaking out of the satiric dancing style that their public adores, they need much sharper material.

They are at their familiar funniest in the broad comedy of gadgets that once involves television and again springs from a deep sea-diving expedition. In each of these sketches, Paul becomes hopelessly entangled in props, while Grace chatters blithely on with her laughable nonsense.

Their song about the Bond Clothes ad on Times Square is a wonderful notion, but like so many other numbers in the show, it lacks a killer for the curtain.

Bert Wheeler is pretty much lost, using what sounds like old material in desperation, and only coming into his own in an imitation of a lady wrestler, a gag which runs dry pretty quickly.

For the rest there is the pretty and pleasant Patricia Wymore to sing and tap, a couple of capable dances by June Graham and Milada Mladova, and some willing vocalizing of not particularly memorable songs by Leni Lynn and Dick Smart.

Edward Gilbert's sets for the production numbers are luxurious and striking, with a festive, period Hudson River Dayliner to close the first act, an interesting stage variation in the "Prodigal Daughter" ballet, and a grandly formal finale.

The elaborate settings are handled with a professional smoothness from which many of the people on stage could take a tip or two. These backgrounds are further enhanced by a great many rich bright costumes designed by Billy Livingston. It seems a great pity that in several cases the over-all carnival effect of the big scenes is sacrificed by wasteful lighting.

The front of the stage is often dark, and the side lighting at the back gives the proceedings more distance, the quality they need least on this deep stage.

In restrospect some of the brighter moments are the various dance styles that aptly ape well-known choreographers, Paul Hartman's preparation for his fish hunt, and Grace Hartman's appearance, dressed to her rhinestone teeth, as "The Farrell Girl."

If there is a song to hum away with you, it is "My Heart's in the Middle of July."

'ALL FOR LOVE'

A revue, with music and lyrics by Allan Roberts and Lester Lee; sketch editor, Max Shulman; production staged by Edward Reveaux; choreography and musical numbers by Eric Victor; scenery by Edward Gilbert; costumes by Billy Livingston; musical direction by Clay Warnick; orchestrations by Ted Royal, Don Walker, Russell Bennett and Hans Spialek; presented by Sammy Lambert and Anthony B. Farrell at the Mark Hellinger Theatre, January 22, 1949. The principals include: Grace and Paul Hartman, Bert Wheeler, Patricia Wymore, Milada Mladova, Dick Smart, Leni Lynn, Kathryne Mylroie, Milton Frome, Paul Reed, Budd Rogerson, June Graham, Richard D'Arcy.

Journal American

JANUARY 24, 1949

A Handsome Mishap 3 Stars Can't Save

By ROBERT GARLAND

After last season's hapless "Hold It," Angel-in-the-Open Anthony Farrell should have called his new one "Drop It" and followed the advice of its rightful title.

Instead, he has named it "All For Love" and is determined to keep it going at the handsomely refurbished Hollywood Theatre, now the Mark Hellinger.

More power to him. By so doing he's keeping any number of actors working, including such established show people as Grace and Paul Hartman and Bert Wheeler.

The first came over from "Angel in the Wings." The last comes over from wherever he went after pretending to be Elwood P. Dowd in "Harvey."

But, at the same time, Mr. Farrell is doing the theatre as such no great favor by urging the reluctant playgoer to spend a long, languid and expensive evening in the presence of his latest venture at playing theatre. For the week end arrival has nothing worthy of the fine, foolish Hartmans. Or the wistful Mr. Wheeler.

"All For Love" suffers most from a dearth of good material. It's sketches, credited to Jane Bishig, Billy K. Wells, Ted Luce, Max Shulman—Mr. Shulman has telegraphed to deny this—and the Hartmans themselves are obvious and dreary. I doubt if four Hartmans and two Wheelers could succeed with them.

The music, too, is flat and familiar. And while in a doubting mood, I doubt if it would sound any less so if in the sixth row of the orchestra you could hear anybody sing it. Excuse it, please, but I did catch a few words of Richard Smart's prise songs,

Dick, I gathered last Saturday evening when the mishap happened, would rather be a poor man with a penny than a rich man with an ulcer. And July in January.

• • •

Opening the evening is the title song, "All For Love," although the love for whom it all is isn't mentioned. This is followed by "Fashion Expert," Ed Wynn's old model sketch with Paul Hartman instead of Ed and a dummy instead of a lovely lady. Then a brash burlesque, with syphon, of "Edward, My Son."

Then a ballet, "The Big Four," kidding our top choreographers. This is an improvement! But a relapse occurs with "Why Can't It Happen Again?", whispered to music by Kathryne Mylroie—can she be the "love" for whom it all is?—and a "Lament" that really is a lament by Bert Wheeler. Yes, he munches a sandwich!

Even the Hartmans on a clothing sign above Broadway, have nothing to do but stand there, union-suited. And the "Benjamin B. O'Dell" which brings the first act to a "Show Boat"-ish conclusion. And the second act, which opens with a ballet beginning like the musical "Street Scene" and ending like nothing at all.

So it goes, pretty tiresome and pretty tasteless, with Miss Mylroie—she must be the "love" for whom it all is—whispering "Oh, How Fortunate You Mortals Be" just before the final finale. Kathryne isn't kidding, especially when I tell you that we mortals are out on Broadway five minutes later.

In spite of Billy Livingston's costumes, which are costly, and Edward Gilbert's scenery, which is showy, I do wish that Angel-in-the-Open Anthony Farrell had seen fit to play theatre with a modest, well ordered repertory company instead of an immodest, haphazard vaudeville show with at least two Broadway favorites wasted in it. . .

"All For Love," "Drop It," "Farrell's Folly," or whatever you choose to call the handsome mishap at the Mark Hellinger, proves that an ardent amateur is no better for the theatre than a slack professional. Could it be that the theatre is playing Anthony Farrell?

NEW YORK STAR
JANUARY 24, 1949

by John Lardner

Love, Money and the Hartmans

A week or so back, it was said with justice of the revue called *Along Fifth Avenue* that it was loose, shapeless, themeless. The same complaint cannot be made against *All for Love*, another revue, which threw open the rich, rolling acres of the Mark Hellinger playhouse (formerly the Hollywood) to the public Saturday night. *All for Love* has shape and distinction, all right, a single pervading characteristic—namely, no material.

If you want a further sign of individuality, here it is: the Hartmans, Grace and Paul, the town's most popular comic dance team, appear in the show but do not dance.

• • •

The producer, and owner of the theater, Anthony B. Farrell, is described by Broadway handicappers as a man looking for ways and means to lose two and a half million bucks. Perhaps *All for Love* is not the quickest short cut, the northwest passage, to that goal, but it does offer certain valuable hints for the next free spender who comes along. If I wanted to liquidate my millions, God forbid, I would borrow Mr. Farrell's general principle, and his sketch-writers and songwriters, too, if I were sure they could repeat their lack of inspiration—and it's a high, taxing standard, maybe too high to reach twice—with the same success.

The Hartmans are to some extent parties to their own martyrdom in *All for Love*, since they had a hand in the sketch-writing. But Bert Wheeler, their co-star, is a pure victim type, as far as I can see. A secret but deadly enemy of Mr. Wheeler's got access to his material and supplied him with a *Clip* and a long joke about a dog, a drunk, and an automobile. It's a tribute to the comedian's critical sense that he told this joke all wrong at the premiere. There's no right way of telling it.

The battle-scarred Mr. Wheeler also shows up in a sketch of degraded but familiar taste about a wrestling match between two ladies, of whom he counterfeits one. Here, to be fair all around, he seems to enjoy himself somewhat, so I take back what I said about his critical sense. His best number is an alleged travesty on *Edward, My Son*, which is actually a knockabout slapstick routine of commendable fury and silliness.

• • •

The Hartmans, too, depend chiefly on props for their best results. Perhaps I exaggerated a trifle when I said they do not dance—they trace out a few steps in two numbers, the only ones that have any style and satirical merit. For the rest, they appear in limp playlets in which indignity and stage properties are piled upon Mr. Hartman; some of these are briefly funny, thanks to the latter's air of dogged incompetence to cope with any environment whatever, but they all begin to sag from attrition before the blackout comes along. Mrs. Hartman, a genial though underprivileged soul in *All for Love*, is happiest in the form of a mock Follies queen—"the Farrell girl"—with diamonds all over her, including a dazzling diamond denture.

There are two or three presentable ensemble numbers; some presentable dancing by Patricia Wymore, Budd Rogerson, Milada Mladova, and June Graham; and some earnest singing by Dick Smart and Leni Lynn of as ordinary a set of songs as was ever collected in one shooting-gallery. Mr. Smart is called on to sing a ballad, the burden of which is "I'd rather be a dreamer with a penny than a rich man with a worried mind," which gives a fair idea of the show's lyric quality.

Possibly Mr. Farrell got what he was after in *All for Love*, but personally I would just as soon see a patrol of the Boy Scouts of America in a good, brisk exhibition of building a fire without matches.

New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews

Subscription orders and reservations are now being taken for the 1949 year, January 1st through December 31st. Place your order now and be sure of your theatre reviews for 1949.

A Valuable and Authoritative Record of the Contemporary Theatre

The New York Times
JANUARY 24, 1949

Farrell's Folly

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Since Grace and Paul Hartman are present and accounted for, "All For Love," which opened at the Mark Hellinger Theatre on Saturday evening, is not completely destitute of talent. No matter how dull an occasion may be, Paul always carries that dismal face around with him, looking sullen, stupid, fatuous, bewildered, and resentful by turns; and Grace always retains that embarrassed, toothy giggle. These are invitations to laughter on every occasion.

Two or three weeks from now, if their producer is still complaisant, the Hartmans may work up their sketchy material into something comic. And since they are celebrated chiefly for their lampoons of dancing, maybe they can be persuaded to offer something out of their repertory of polite slapstick, which is still the best thing they do. But their sketches for the current show are not ready for the paying public yet. The Hartmans have not mastered either the props or the timing. They have never looked like such shoddy workmen as they do now.

* * *

"All For Love" is the hobby of Anthony B. Farrell, an Albany banknotes and chain man, who put on "Hold It" last season with no encouragement from the public, and has now bought a handsome theatre, which he has named after Mark Hellinger, and where he proposes to stage a series of musical shows.

Broadway is in no position to snub friends, even if they are wealthy. But talent is more essential than money, as the current success of "Lend an Ear" proves; and money cannot be traded for talent on even terms. Money has to have some talent of its own. "All For Love" is a musical show in an obsolete style without a single good song or a set of intelligent lyrics and very little to recommend it in the other departments.

Bert Wheeler has nothing to offer except a kind of pathetic eagerness to be entertaining. In spite of the obvious ballet skills of Milada Mladova, Eric Victor's choreographic numbers are without distinction. Something appreciative should be said for Billy Livingston's decorative costumes, particularly for the ball gowns in the last scene. But "All For Love" lacks a point of view or motive apart from Mr. Farrell's fascination with show business; and anything good that may be in it is overwhelmed by the general lack of taste, design and knowledge of modern theatre.

Everyone can applaud Mr. Farrell's wish that people should enjoy themselves at the Mark Hellinger Theatre. One of the things most essential to enjoyment is a show on the stage.

Daily Mirror
JANUARY 24, 1949

'All for Love' Opens At the Hellinger

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Sammy Lambert and Anthony B. Farrell have brought a costly new revue, "All for Love," to the Mark Hellinger Theatre. The Hellinger was formerly known as the Hollywood. It was renamed as a tribute to the late columnist and film producer. It is a beautiful house, and the new arrival is a beautiful show.

The sets by Edward Gilbert and the costumes by Billy Livingston are gorgeous. Lambert and Farrell must have spent a fortune on them. But unfortunately the producers have failed to provide good sketches and music to match them. We got few laughs during the evening, and we can't remember any of the songs.

Max Shulman has penned a number of amusing short stories and books, but, though he was assisted in the present instance by Jane Bishir, Billy K. Wells, Ted Luce, Grace and Paul Hartman, the chuckles come at too widely spaced intervals. The score by Allan Roberts and Lester Lee would be more at home on a nightclub floor than on a Broadway stage.

The wonderful Hartmans and Bert Wheeler, a really funny comedian, struggle valiantly and in vain with mediocre material.

Ballerina Milada Mladova was more fortunate than the Hartmans and Wheeler. She merely had to dance and not cope with a lack of words and tunes. Patricia Wymore, a pretty tapster, and Dick Smart, a good - looking singer, also are among the revue's assets. Others in the cast are Leni Lynn, Kathryne Mylorie, Milton Frome, Paul Reed, Budd Rogerson, June Graham and Richard D'Arcy.

Edward Reveaux staged the production, and Eric Victor did the choreography.

We're afraid "All for Love" is aptly titled. We doubt that it will make the cash register run a hot-box. Even the popular Hartmans and Wheeler are no better than their writers, and their writers seem to have been on something of a holiday during rehearsals.

Frankly, we wanted to like "All For Love," but it didn't give us a chance. Despite its good intentions, it never manages to be other than a dull and pedestrian song-and-dancer.

An old custom was revived at the Hellinger last evening, when boxes and baskets of flowers were brought down the aisles to the principals at the show's end. The same containers should have been brought down during the overture, packed with hilarious sketches and catchy music.

DAILY NEWS
JANUARY 24, 1949

The Hartmans and Wheeler Help 'All For Love'—But Not Enough

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Except for an occasional bit of real humor from Grace and Paul Hartman and some Palace Theatre burlesque from Bert Wheeler, the revue titled "All for Love" is not worth all the fuss and time and money and publicity it took to open it at the Mark Hellinger Theatre Saturday evening. It is an obvious affair with little wit, fair singers, forgettable songs and spectacular settings and costumes.

Paul Hartman is quite funny in a sketch about a studious deep-sea diver who comes up with a mermaid; Grace Hartman is charming when she says, brightly, "I studied with Martha Graham—she was Miss Hush, you know"; Bert Wheeler is laughable and lowdown when he is disguised as a lady wrestler.

But other fine ideas for the stars fail to come off. The Hartmans appear as the neon-lighted, apparently naked Colossi who flank that clothing-store waterfall which takes up a Broadway block, in order to sing "It's a Living." This should be hilarious, for the idea is witty and Edward Gilbert's setting is excellent—but the song falls flat; Cole Porter should have written it.

Again, Mr. Wheeler appears in a travesty of Robert Morley's "Edward, My Son" which should have been sharp and amusing and is just ordinary.

The Producer the Hero.

The stars' supporting company is large and very well dressed by Billy Livingston. Mr. Gilbert's settings obviously cost a pretty penny and they make full use of the theatre's big turntable. Patricia Wymore, Milada Mladova, Dick Smart, Leni Lynn, Kathryn Mylorie and others sing or dance or both. The main ballet number is an effective affair, scenically, in which June Graham and Miss Mladova compete as a pair of honky-tonk burlesquers.

The hero of "All for Love" still is Anthony B. Farrell, a show-struck gent from the State Capitol who made his debut as producer of "Hold It" last May and since then has had more publicity than Olivia De Havilland. He has spent generously and cheerfully. He bought the Warners' Broadway movie theatre, which is a comfortable big place, redecorated it at great cost and renamed it in memory of Mark Hellinger, who was everybody's dear friend.

All For Experience.

Like everybody else, I have welcomed Mr. Farrell to the producing ranks, for anybody with money and enthusiasm should be coddled in any business. But, after witnessing "All for Love," I have a feeling that we have been taking Mr. Farrell for a ride. He does not yet have judgment as to what is a good tune, a good lyric or a good sketch. I think he made a mistake in putting a revue which is basically intimate and players who are intimate in so big a theatre, no matter how handsome the theatre is.

A showman can make money—but money cannot make a showman. The making of a showman requires taste in judgment based on experience; so let's put "All for Love" down as experience for Mr. Farrell—and hope that his enthusiasm and his money hold out.

"All for Love"—*continued*

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

JANUARY 24, 1949

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

Love Is Not Enough

WHEN the inimitable dancing clowns, Grace and Paul Hartman, team up in a revue with Bert Wheeler one might reasonably anticipate an evening of satirical gaiety. "All for Love," at the newly named Mark Hellinger Theater, spreads it very thin. The Sammy Lambert-Anthony B. Farrell production has all the finish in the world. Edward Gilbert's sets and the costumes by Billy Livingston are stylish, theatrical and always appropriate. They have very little comic or terpsichorean substance to decorate. The sketches are lean on laughter. The songs are indifferent and too frequently sung off key. And even the gifted Milada Mladova has a bad time of it trying to save matters with a ballet.

* * *

After "Angel in the Wings," the Hartmans should have turned their attention to something of more stage consequence than "All for Love." Their new starring venture finds them blundering through aimless sketches edited by Max Shulman. "Isolde" and "Sea Diver" are notable for their lack of a really comic point of view. Wheeler fares better in some of the more fetching episodes in the offering, but he brings far more to sorry material than it deserves. The music and lyrics by Allan Roberts and Lester Lee are derivative, rather than inspired, while Eric Victor's staging of the dances and songs only reaches a point of precision and excitement in "My Heart's in the Middle of July."

There are a number of talented collaborators in the performance of the musical. Patricia Wymore and Budd Rogerson sing and dance "My Baby's Bored" with exuberance. Dick Smart is on hand to try to make some sense out of the skits and sing a rather dull ditty called "Dreamer With a Penny." Kathryne Mylroie chants occasionally and the ensemble makes a lot of a strictly show-girl number called "The Farrell Girl." In his staging Edward Reveaux has done what he could to give the proceedings pace and variety, but "All For Love" is a badly seasoned goulash.

It would be idle to list the writers, whose ideas have been edited by Shulman. Suffice it to say that there are far too many of them. A revue stands or falls on a cohesive satirical pattern, backed up, of course, by good music and lyrics. There is neither unity, humor, nor musical felicity in "All For Love." Miss Hartman frequently gets fun out of sheer pantomime, and her husband and Wheeler struggle to put over lamentable charades. They do it the hard way in the Mark Hellinger Theater exhibit. They rarely succeed in making a dreary compendium of old jokes and borrowed tunes satisfying.

New York Post
HOME NEWS

JANUARY 24, 1949

A Stage Catastrophe Called 'All for Love'

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

A number of people with hitherto unblemished reputations were involved in disaster at Anthony B. Farrell's elaborate new Mark Hellinger Theatre Saturday night. Mr. Farrell, the latest dreamy millionaire to get entangled in show business, obviously had only the most generous motives when he consorted with a producer called Sammy Lambert in the production of a nonesuch idealistically described as "All For Love," but it must be glumly reported that his good intentions are the sort with which hell is alleged to be paved.

"All for Love" is, indeed, a calamity of epic proportions. Under the blight of dullness, tastelessness and overpowering lack of good sense, reason totters as one contemplates the waste of money, the wreck of talent, the absence of humor and imagination, and the tedious vulgarity involved in the proceedings. There isn't a good song, a passable sketch, a superior dance routine, or even a fair joke to enliven the evening, and you begin to wonder about the players themselves.

The Hartmans

For example, after seeing "Angel in the Wings" last season, most of us were convinced that Grace and Paul Hartman were honored additions to the thinning ranks of the first-rank comics. Now, in "All for Love," watching them in growing dismay, seeing them hopelessly enmeshed in some of the dullest and most vulgar sketches known to mankind, I, for one, started to wonder if we hadn't been mistaken in them a year ago. As for pleasant, likeable Bert Wheeler, it was pathetic to see him battling hopelessly against fate.

In the entire course of the evening, I remember being amused just once. And that, I hasten to add, was not in one of the numbers intended as comedy. It was when a toothy gentleman entitled Dick Smart sang wistfully and with much striving after charm a terribly serious song about how he would rather be a dreamer with a penny than a rich man without dreams. I suspect that of being one of the low points in revue history, but there are some other moments in the new show that at least approach it.

Lucky Girls

In such an epoch-making disaster, it is a feat for a performer to keep his head up and not be destroyed in the general massacre, and it seemed to me that just two of the hapless company achieved it. The beautiful Milada Mladova, loveliest-looking of ballerinas, has virtually nothing to do, for which she should thank heaven, but she does it charmingly, while the attractive Patricia Wymore also suggests that "All for Love" should not be held against her.

It was suggested to me after the opening Saturday night that we reviewers would be less widely regarded as ogres if we were kind to pathetic offerings like the monstrosity at the Mark Hellinger and tried to let them down easily. All I can say is that if any critic ever, through misplaced kindness of heart, led a prospective playgoer to pay money to see "All for Love" he would be committing a sin against the entire theatre.

The Sun

JANUARY 24, 1949

By WARD MOREHOUSE

All for Nothing.

Anthony B. Farrell, that amiable man of inexhaustible and unresisting millions, has beautified a big Broadway theater and has given it a new name, and on Saturday evening he opened it with a revue as tasteless and witless as anything the New York stage has had during the past half century.

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"All for Love," as this new exhibit is called, is a production of unlimited expenditure, overpowering ineptitude, and unfathomable dullness. Its mediocrity is all-enveloping to the point of being communicable: even the once sprightly Hartmans, Grace and Paul, are painfully unfunny, and seem quite defeated by the elaborateness and general incompetence of the proceedings.

The music for "All for Love," now occupying the playhouse that Farrell bought and named for Mark Hellinger, is utterly routine. The lyrics are forgettable. The sketches are skimpy and frequently vulgar. Revue sketches can hardly get worse than "Morris, My Son," the parody on "Edward, My Son."

It's a show that has been handsomely costumed, raggedly staged, and the big and costly scenic numbers, which are done to the accompaniment of insipid songs—there's one called "My Heart's in the Middle of July," and there's another about the Benjamin B. Odell, with the Hudson River Day steamer pulling away from its pier in 1899—only serve to set you to wondering just how deeply they have cut into the Farrell bank roll.

Those droll and likable buffoons, the Hartmans, show little of the zest in "All for Love" that was theirs when they appeared in the trim revue, "Angel in the Wings," and it's apparent that they will soon have to work up some new material. That also goes for Bert Wheeler, who gropes his way through the evening, using something of Hank Ladd's monologue methods and getting something less than Ladd's results. Grace Hartman, a fine trouper, strives valiantly to bring some of her sketch material to life, and Paul manages to be fairly amusing as Professor Pisces Beebe, the renowned sea diver, but for most of the evening he is just somebody else on the stage. I'll settle for the Hartmans against a black back drop, and until they get a better show it will be fun to watch them at the Plaza or in the Wedgewood Room of the Waldorf.

The one member of the "All for Love" company who bears up courageously all evening is the red-headed and pretty legged Patricia Wymore, who sings, taps, and conducts herself commendably, never giving the impression for an instant that it's all for a hopeless cause.

Tony Farrell could have given us a season of Shaw, plus a bit of Wilde and a dash of Pinero, for probably half of what "All for Love" has cost. He can bring some business into the big and fancy Hellinger Theater by putting a $2 top scale into effect immediately. But he will never get his money back, and that, of course, he knows. Another Albany fortune has been spent on nothing at all.

"Leaf and Bough"

The Sun

JANUARY 22, 1949

By WARD MOREHOUSE

A Dreary and Violent Play.

The New York theater, through the years, has had numerous plays of the bleakness of life on the prairie. Good ones, like Maxwell Anderson's "White Desert," and lesser ones, like "The Mud Turtle." Now comes a new young dramatist, Joseph Hayes, with a drama called "Leaf and Bough," which has an Indiana locale. It was presented last evening at the Cort.

"Leaf and Bough" is a heavy-footed and monotonous play of the love of a boy and girl against a background of sordidness, ugliness and complete futility. A violent and dreary play, with characters that frequently suggest those of Tennessee Williams, but also a play that reminds us of the magnitude of the Williams talent.

There are moments here and there in "Leaf and Bough" that are touching and tender-hearted, such as those of the first meeting of the lovers on the hilltop, but Playwright Hayes does not sustain the mood fleetingly created in the opening act. His drama becomes fumbling and awkward, and it seems to grow longer and longer as the evening goes along.

Nan Warren is a farm girl and Mark Campbell is a town boy and the author strives to write of their love, their hope, and their yearnings. They find opposition from her hidebound father and from his fiendish and bullying brother. Lies are told, obstacles are created, and there are scenes of bitterness and degradation. But Nan and Mark grope their way through, and it's their final decision, notwithstanding an unhallowed environment of meanness and hopelessness, to go on with their love, and take their chances against life's complexities.

The astute Rouben Mamoulian has given his time to the staging of this lumbering "Leaf and Bough," and he must have seen a great deal in it that did not come through upon the stage of the Cort last night. If this new play often brings the frustrations of "Summer and Smoke" to mind, it also makes the Tennessee Williams drama seem a masterpiece in retrospect.

There are several performances to be commended. Richard Hart gets a measure of effectiveness into his playing of the confused Mark, whose weak father is a drunkard and whose mother is a trollop. Coleen Gray, as the farmer's daughter, has some good moments. She is vivid in her scenes upon the hilltop. Charlton Heston holds your interest as the repulsive and despicable brother. Anthony Ross makes something of a character of a churlish and hard-fisted Indiana farmer. William Jeffrey is quite all right as the garrulous grandfather, who goes to his death playing his harmonica, and so is Tom McElhany in his sketch of the country doctor.

Carl Kent's scenery shows the kitchen of the farmhouse and the living room of the house in the small town and the action of the play shifts jerkily from one interior to the other. There is a great deal that is crude and rude and ugly in the lives of the people of these homes, but of the two families the farm folk are the duller.

Playwrights of quality have been scarce since Tennessee Williams hurtled into our midst. Mamoulian is of the notion that Joseph is a young dramatist of promise. I shall reserve judgment until his next play. "Leaf and Bough" is a blurry and uncertain drama, and for much of the way a very dull one.

'LEAF AND BOUGH'

Play by Joseph Hayes; staged and lighted by Rouben Mamoulian; settings by Carl Kent; presented by Charles P. Heidt at the Cort Theatre, January 21, 1949. The cast:

Bert Warren.....Anthony Ross
Myra Warren....Dorothy Elder
Attie Warren.....Louise Buckley
Mary Warren..Mary Linn Beller
Grandpa Nelson..William Jeffrey
Laura Campbell..Alice Reinheart
Frederick Campbell..David White
Glenn Campbell..Charlton Heston
Mark Campbell....Richard Hart
Nan Warren.....Coleen Gray
Harlan Adams.....Jared Reed
Dr.Vincent Cullen..Tom McElhany

Synopsis: The action takes place in and around a small town in the Middle West;the kitchen of the Warren farmhouse in the country;the living room of the Campbell home in the town,and the top of Sycamore Hill.Act I-Begins on an evening in autumn.Act II-Begins next morning.Act III-Begins next day.

DAILY NEWS

JANUARY 22, 1949

'Leaf & Bough' Perfectly Staged, But Lacks Singing Commercials

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The touch of a master director is so much in evidence in the Cort Theatre's new play, "Leaf and Bough," that it should be retitled in his honor and called "Rouben Mamoulian Faces Life." It is the best-acted, best-lighted, best-set radio serial I ever saw, with never a trick missed in script or production.

The script is by Joseph Hayes. It was tried out by Margo Jones in Dallas, where Tennessee Williams' "Summer and Smoke" had its debut. The settings by Carl Kent are splendid, accomplishing in realistic fashion much the same sort of thing—two houses containing two families on the stage at the same time—that Jo Mielziner achieved with a delicate hint or two in "Summer and Smoke."

Mr. Hayes' families are, reading from left to right, a farm clan who are generally frustrated and a town tribe who are even more so. The farmer's daughter and the town boy fall in love and have one heck of a time remaining in this condition, what with the interference of various types of relatives; but love conquers all, surviving even a clear-cut case of criminal assault by boy upon girl.

But No Commercials.

In five-minute bits, between which there are no singing commercials, news bulletins or weather reports, Mr. Hayes takes up the cases of the various inhabitants of the two houses—first at the farm, then in town, then back again, and so on—one by one.

His portraits are sharply drawn and Mr. Mamoulian's actors do very well by them. There are such exhibits as the farm father, solid and decent and hard-working—so hard-working that nobody can remember when he last kissed his wife; the wife, who could do with some kissing; the elder daughter, who loves the boy in town and nature, too; a spinster relative—frustrated, of course, or she wouldn't be a spinster now—who is right out of Lillian Hellman and Patricia Collinge, and a grandfather who finally dies while he is still playing the harmonica, being quite a character.

Well Chosen Company.

On the town side of the stage the exhibits include the boy, who loves the finer things of life, like music, and is really sorry when he commits an offense upon his beloved which would get him 20 years to life in any court; his brother, who seems quite unnaturally evil; his father, who is a weakling and a souse, and his mother, who would have been a trollop if she'd had the chance.

There also is a doctor who is—guess— a philosopher.

I wish I could be more respectful toward "Leaf and Bough," for it is extremely well presented. Such players as Anthony Ross, Louise Buckley, William Jeffrey, Alice Reinheart, David White and Tom McElhany are very effective in their individual five-minute scenes and get nice applause on their exit lines. Richard Hart plays the boy with fine intensity.

The one I like best is Coleen Gray, a lass from the movies who has a lovely voice, the looks of a small Ingrid Bergman and a good, straightforward approach to the business of acting. She plays the girl, of course.

With Mr. Kent's fine setting to work within, Mr. Mamoulian has staged everything with infinite care, getting as many performances out of electricians as he does from actors. It's a pity that "Leaf and Bough" is claptrap.

Journal American

JANUARY 24, 1949

The Leaf Falls Off the Bough

Maybe the theatre is what's the matter with the theatre. In the face of "Leaf and Bough" which, at the Cort, opened and shut like a door over the week end, I wouldn't be surprised. In and around the piece's make-up, almost everything was wrong. Professionally!

Consider Rouben Mamoulian. With his proud productional name in larger letters than the author, actors or producer, he's an established worker in the show business like which there's no other. Many a sound success is to his professional credit.

Then look at Joseph Hayes, the author. He, too, isn't what you'd call an amateur. He has served as assistant editor for Samuel French, play publisher. It was, I read, "this editorial work on other people's scripts" that led to "Leaf and Bough." Tennessee Williams' scripts, most likely!

Then, again, there's Charles Heidt, the producer. He's been associated with such professionals as Crosby Gaige and the Theatre Guilders, Armina Marshall and Lawrence Langner. And, as co-author of "Amber," with Pauline Fredericks. And with the Citronella Circuit somewhere in New Jersey.

And there were actors at the Cort. All professional, all members of Actors Equity. If they hadn't been, they wouldn't have been on hand professionally. Yet—

* * *

Hur Overpowered

Turning to Carl Kent's noctambulous settings, these included a large slice of farmhouse, a large slice of townhouse and a heavy hunk of hilltop. At the Cort, they were all traipsing around together, with a pair of scenic curtains as counter irritants. They'd have overpowered "Ben Hur."

Mr. Kent, responsible for the swinging interiors, the moving mountain and the irritating curtains, is also a professional. He has contributed with his right hand to "Carmen Jones" and "Oklahoma" while, with his left, he has been (again I quote the programs) getting himself known as a rare jazz pianist.

As for the players, Broadway has known most of them professionally. Richard Hart was the Witch Boy in "Dark of the Moon." Anthony Ross was the Gentleman Caller in "The Glass Menagerie." Charlton Heston was the Proculeius in "Antony and Cleopatra." William Jeffrey was a George M. Cohan standby.

Yet all these professionals saw fit to turn their time and talents to "Leaf and Bough," a dreary, derivitive, unlikely little play in the pre-"Battle of Angels" Tennessee Williams tradition. City Slicker meets Farmer's Daughter and doesn't do right by her up on a spot-lighted itinerant hilltop.

Somewhere, sometime, Joseph Hayes was awarded a prize from somebody for his "Leaf and Bough." But not at the Cort, last Friday by a fine first congregation.

ROBERT GARLAND.

New York Herald Tribune

JANUARY 22, 1949

By Bert McCord

Animated Reading

THERE is sufficient evidence at hand to prove that in script form "Leaf and Bough" looked like a play deserving of a production. The reasons why could even be detected through the many scenes that were given on the stage of the Cort Theater last evening. Unfortunately, this Rouben Mamoulian production emerged as nothing more than an animated reading.

The reason for the failure of this first play by Joseph Hayes does not lie in Mr. Mamoulian's production. It may be found instead in the script itself. As a matter of fact, the very elements which must have made it seem worthwhile as a literary effort contribute to its undoing as a stage vehicle.

* * *

In writing his love story of a boy and girl of disparate backgrounds who seek to solve life's mysteries and to resolve their own problems, Mr. Hayes has embellished his tale with a myriad of platitudes and far too many pseudo-symbolic simplicities. The former tax any actor's delivery, while of the latter it may be said that one direct question would certainly leave both the actor and the author at a loss to explain what he had intended.

* * *

The entire burden of establishing the characters of the play has been left to the actors and even they were unable last night to disguise the fact that the author himself is talking through all of them. But if he is a novice at dialogues, he does display an incipient dramatic flair which enabled the actors to bring the script to life spasmodically only to have it lapse immediately afterward into a series of readings.

Credit for much of what compulsion the play has must be given to Richard Hart and Coleen Gray.

As the younger son of a dissolute city family in the Middle West who seeks to cast off the cynicism engendered by his shabby surroundings, Mr. Hart has a difficult part. Working into it slowly, he manages to obtain as firm a hold as possible before the final curtain. Miss Gray has a bit of a head start in the role of the romantic but down-to-earth daughter of a farming family equally miserable and bogged down in a false righteousness. She is attractive and handles herself well in her debut performance.

* * *

There is a full complement of character parts designed no doubt to lend atmosphere and establish local color, not to mention again the dissemination of the author's own ideas. They get in the way somehow and never manage to blend with the stage picture. Alice Reinheart has the showiest of these bits, while Charlton Heston works hard and to some avail with the one completely unmotivated part, that of the boy's brother. Anthony Ross and Dorothy Elder struggle with two thankless roles as the farmer and his wife, and Jared Reed is quite convincing as the hayseed suitor.

A double setting by Carl Kent representing the kitchen of the farm house and the living room of the town house is authentic enough, but was lighted so that confusion arose as the action shifted from one to the other. Perhaps the only complaint to be registered against the hill setting is that somehow or other the stars contrived to look like gold sequins.

New York World-Telegram

JANUARY 22, 1949

'Leaf and Bough' Opens at the Cort

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

For ordinary people to have dramatic or literary value, their dreams or frustrations must be expressed in poetic terms beyond their real tongues, or their intimate conflicts must strike sparks potent enough to light big fires. The characters of "Leaf and Bough" achieve such importance only fleetingly, and the author has not had anything new or inspired to say about their problems.

Only one character has the stature to step out of her rut, and the result is a play that is wide-eyed about the waste of life and love in humdrum circumstances.

The Warrens are a respectable farming family in a Midwestern village, whose daughter Nan has more spirit and humor about life than all the rest of three generations put together. Against the will of her family, she loves Mark Campbell, a boy with more ambition than will. His father is a lush, his brother a lecher and his mother a perennial, discontented belle.

When Nan persists in marrying Mark, her father drives her away from home. Mark's brother, Glenn, cynical about all women, cannot face the loss of Mark's companionship. He urges their father to steal the money Mark has saved, then convinces Mark that Nan has already allotted a generous portion of her time to haystacks.

In drunken bitterness Mark attacks Nan, but has not the courage to run away even though he knows Glenn's claims are untrue. His remorseful promises for the future win Nan back.

This is told mostly in a double

set depicting the two families' homes. The spatial tightness emphasizes the inevitable physical friction in which these people live, but in dramatic scenes it causes the acting to become petulant.

Coleen Gray achieves a neat feat in making Nan both sturdy and dewy. It is an easy, straightforward performance. As the indecisive Mark, Richard Hart is true to a character who has not so much a multitude of sides as he has no very strong ones.

The rest of the cast is entirely capable of its tasks. Anthony Ross plays Nan's father with quiet stubbornness, and William Jeffrey brings touching lucidity to the role of her grandfather.

As the cynical brother, Glenn, Charlton Heston is entirely convincing without making the boy despicable, and Alice Reinheart adds a quality of coy and damaged youthfulness to the role of the boys' mother.

The play is written in vignettes, usually bitter, sordid or hopeless in tone. It is a form that better suits a book like "Spoon River Anthology" and a mood that needs the brash climactic revelations of a "King's Row."

Daily Mirror

JANUARY 22, 1949

'Leaf and Bough' Is Dull, Ugly and Unreal

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Alice Reinheart was playing in "Life Can Be Beautiful" on the radio, when along came producer Charles P. Heidt with "Leaf and Bough," which could well be subtitled, "Life Can Be Ugly." So, for some unaccountable reason, unfortunate Alice, a swell trouper, switched from the former to the latter. Come to think of it, the new arrival at the Cort also could be titled "Life Can Be Dull."

When author Joseph Hayes gets a dose of the dramatic miseries, he gets a lulu. In "Leaf and Bough," he has really penned a weeping willow. Everybody in the Warren and Campbell families is a potential case for a psychiatrist. Everybody is just so frustrated, unhappy or low as to make a first-nighter squirm in his seat or want to commit mayhem.

In fact, there was one lady in the audience last evening who did the latter by proxy. When nasty-minded Mark Campbell insulted pure little Nan Warren on an isolated Hoosier hilltop, Nan gave him a good belt in the jaw. Whereupon the customer out front shouted encouragingly, "Good for you!"

The farmer Warrens are a thrifty, maladjusted lot of rustics, and the Campbells are a mean, cheating, drinking and fighting urban gang. All of them are types rather than people, and they talk like wired-for-sound tintypes. It seems that Southern Indiana just isn't a place for joy and contentment, if one is to believe observer Hayes.

However, by the time the gloom in the Cort had gotten sufficiently thick to cut with a blunt knife, old Grandpa Nelson decides to up and die. His demise succeeds in re-uniting remorseful Mark and slightly tarnished Nan. As if all this weren't enough, upon exiting we ran into a heavy downpour of rain. When it rains, it really pours these nights.

Producer Heidt has engaged a first-rate cast for Rouben Mamoulian to direct, but maestro Mamoulian's staging is as sombre, stained-glassy and unreal as the script.

Richard Hart, who was so excellent as the Witch Boy in "Dark of the Moon," and Coleen Gray, an attractive film starlet, have come on from Hollywood for unrewarding assignments. Charlton Heston, a good bet for the future, and such reliable performers as Dorothy Elder, Louise Buckley, Mary Linn Beller, Anthony Ross, William Jeffrey, David White, Jared Reed and Tom McElhany also are trapped in the drab proceedings.

Carl Kent has designed novel and atmospheric settings. All they need is a good play to fill them. In fairness to Hayes, it should be reported that he shows promise as a dramatist, but the promise has yet to be fulfilled.

NEW YORK STAR

JANUARY 24, 1949

A Couple of Bitter Families Fight With Life

By JOHN LARDNER

Joseph Hayes' *Leaf and Bough*, which opened at the Cort Friday night, is a play that winds itself up with the fearful intensity of Bob Feller about to throw his last one, and then gets the ball up to the plate, or near there, on three bounces. I have seldom seen muscles so thoroughly bound.

All the characters in *Leaf and Bough*, who live, as well as I can judge, in the fork of the White and the Wabash in southern Indiana, are twisted, tortured, frustrated, and seething with emotion. They open their mouths with a churning of the jaw muscles and close them with a grinding of teeth. What emerges from the sound track in between these operations is a string of stilted speeches, faintly embroidered in purple, which, at their best, are wholesomely and involuntarily funny and, at their worst, will remind you of other speeches you were doing your best to forget.

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"Is that all there is? There must be something more than that," says one character to another from time to time, referring to both (1) the life of the body and (2) the life of the mind. As you can see, they are a hard lot to satisfy.

Toward the end, things get more restful.

"Let me make a life for you, Nan — with my hands, with my heart, with all my love," says the principal young male to the principal young female, whom he has raped in an earlier scene. The new approach pleases the girl better than the first one. She says it is all right with her, and then goes off to throw a wooden figure carved by her grandfather into the Wabash, which will carry it into the Ohio, which will carry it into the Mississippi, which will carry it into the sea.

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It's possible, I guess, to describe the plot of *Leaf and Bough* more succinctly than that. A bitter farm family is involved with a bitter town family on a Jung-Adler-Montague-Capulet basis; each family abounds in human wreckage, but the boy and girl, after a bad mauling at the hands of their kinsmen and each other, find escape and peace. I honestly think, however, that the jangled and jumbled state of Mr. Hayes' work is better conveyed by some of the details of the story, like the riparian progress of Grandpa's sculpture, mentioned above.

This Grandpa describes himself as a man trapped by life. He has a Mark Twain mustache and hairdo, drinks liquor, plays the harmonica on his deathbed, and speaks in fresh, forceful prose, like this: "You wouldn't (chuckle) fool your old grandpa, would you?"

The hero is a bank clerk with a mixed bent for music, poetry, murder, and defloration, who keeps $327 in savings between the pages of a copy of *Moby Dick*, which his brother calls "some kind of fish story." The brother refers to himself in the third person, is illiterate, and has a mother instinct and an anti-marriage complex. Their father is a dipsomaniac and kleptomaniac with a nice singing voice. Their mother wants to be known as a Madame de Pompadour emeritus, and passes her time reading confession magazines.

The girl's family contains an inhibited mother, a neurotic spinster aunt, and a psychopathically self-righteous father.

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Somewhere along the line—perhaps in Dallas, where they both made a road stand—*Leaf and Bough* acquired a strong superficial resemblance to Tennessee Williams's *Summer and Smoke*: same scenery plan, same juxtaposition of decayed families, same atmosphere of half-rotted southland (for lower Indiana is a fringe of the old south). The salient difference is that *Summer and Smoke* is eloquent and powerful, *Leaf and Bough* is maudlin and banal.

The actors have a rough and frustrating time of it with Mr. Hayes' play, though I liked Coleen Gray, a handsome ingenue from Hollywood; Richard Hart, a direct and honest young leading man; and David White, who looks and sounds just about right as a rakish, middle-aged, small-town failure. A four-piece orchestra plays pleasant tunes between acts, including, as theme music, *On the Banks of the Wabash*, by the southern Indiana minstrel team of Paul Dresser and Theodore Dreiser.